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ABSTRACT

A study was done on the variation in characteristics, roles, and functions of institutional research professionals affiliated with the Southern Association for Institutional Research (SAIR). The study examined professional role identity, location of offices in the organizational hierarchy, breadth of institutional research activities undertaken, and perceived levels of satisfaction with various activities. Respondents (110 out of 240) to a survey provided demographic data and information on degrees of institutional research activity, location of research office in organizational structure, and individual to whom the respondent reported. Respondents also described other professional development activities and other job related responsibilities. Data on the size and scope of the research office were also collected. Analysis found that: (1) the smaller the institution the more likely it was that the institutional research office reported directly to the president; (2) about 25 percent of research professionals taught an academic course; (3) one-third were currently engaged in research activities for professional development; (4) location in the organizational hierarchy did not appear to influence longevity in an institutional research position or professional satisfaction; and (5) offices had a mean staff size of 4.53 and overall group mean salary was $46,852. (Contains 32 references.) (JB)

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The Characteristics, Roles and Functions of Institutional Research Professionals in the Southern Association for Institutional Research

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The Characteristics, Roles and Functions of Institutional Research Professionals in the Southern Association for Institutional Research

Abstract

This paper describes the results of research conducted on the variation in characteristics, roles, and functions of institutional research professionals affiliated with the Southern Association for Institutional Research (*SAIR*). Based in part on earlier research by Volkwien (1989), Gutter (1990), Chen (1992), and Harrington, Knight, and Christie (1994), this investigation focuses on some of the basic issues central to institutional research and planning; professional role identity, location of office in the organizational hierarchy, breadth of institutional research activities undertaken, and perceived levels of satisfaction with various activities.

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Introduction

The evolution of institutional research as a recognized academic profession in American higher education faces a number of distinct and perplexing issues. According to Volkwien and Argotes (1989), a few salient themes have emerged which contribute to the ambiguity of the profession. First, institutional research officers suffer from obscurity of professional identity. Institutional research and institutional researchers do not have the benefit of a rich tradition or high visibility past (Seybert, 1991; Peterson, 1985; Saupe, 1981). A second issue facing institutional research addresses the extent to which institutional research activities are, or should be organizationally centralized. Of late, there has been a great deal of attention brought to the necessity for a delineation and separation of the institutional research *office* and the institutional research *function* (Harrington, Knight, Christie, 1994; Peterson and Corcoran, 1989; and Middaugh, 1984). The propagation of institutional research functional activities has been recognized as central to ensuring broad based institutional participation in the assessment of institutional effectiveness (Rogers and Gentemann, 1989; Hearn and Corcoran, 1988).

A third issue pertains to the location of the institutional research office within the organizational structure and the breadth and depth of the institutional research functions. The location of the institutional research office in the organizational structure affects its ability to function effectively, influence the nature of institutional research activities conducted, and determine the importance and impact of institutional research on the

institution's decision support system (Harrington, Knight, and Christie, 1994; Taylor, 1990; Clagett and Huntingdon, 1990; and Saupe, 1989).

A fourth consideration, in light of recent substantial revisions adopted by regional accrediting agencies, involves the extent to which institutional research offices are or should be involved in assessing student learning outcomes and institutional effectiveness. Nichols and Wolfe (1990) and Moore (1988) have argued that institutional research should play a significant role in institutional effectiveness and outcomes assessment implementation. However, the research of Volkwien (1989), Harrington, Knight, and Christie (1994) discovered very little meaningful participation by institutional research offices in student learning outcomes assessment due primarily to constraints in staff size, resources, and location in the institution's organizational structure.

The Institutional Research Profession

Institutional research as a separate and distinct profession has been serving higher education for decades. Its practice can be traced back to the early 18th century. The collection, analysis, and dissemination of institutional data can be traced to peer exchange between Harvard and the founding of Yale in 1701 (Cowley, 1960; Dressel, 1971; and Tetlow, 1979).

Institutional research bears other titles such as 'institutional studies', 'institutional analysis', and 'institutional planning'. However, their primary functions of providing

information for institutional planning, policy formulation, and decision making are the same. Past studies indicate that about half of higher education institutions' institutional research offices are headed by persons who have doctorate degrees, with few teaching duties. Most institutional research professionals have master's degrees in the disciplines of social sciences or education (Tetlow, 1979; Reichard, 1981; Taylor, 1990; and Chen, 1992), and have less than six years of experience in the institutional research field (Volkwien, 1990).

Studies show that the full time equivalent (FTE) size of the institution is correlated with the size of the institutional research office (Roney, 1970; Wheeler, 1972). In addition, the larger the institutional research office, the more likely professional staff are to possess the doctorate degree and have previous institutional research related experiences (Harrington, Knight, and Christie, 1994; Naylor, 1989; Volkwein, 1990).

The activities performed by each institutional research office are likely to be different, as dictated by individual circumstances, such as institutional size, mission, location in the organizational hierarchy, and locus of control (Perch, 1969; Roney, 1970; Dressel 1971; Naylor, 1989; Middaugh, 1990; Chen, 1992; and Harrington, Knight, and Christie, 1994). Volkwein's (1990) study found that the length of professional experience and the level of education received are associated with the level of the tasks performed in the institutional research office. The more experienced and higher degreed the researcher, the more sophisticated and complex the tasks undertaken.

Institutional Research Functions

The functional activities of institutional research cover a varied and broad scope of studies which touch upon almost every corner of the academe. Literature on institutional research activities conducted during the past decade reveal that the most frequently conducted studies are student enrollment management (recruitment/attrition/retention), compiling data responses to national surveys and questionnaires, producing institutional fact books, peer institutional data exchange, and student related reporting and projection (Tetlow, 1979; Reichard, 1982; Volkwein, 1990; Litwin & Bolgiano, 1991; and Chen, 1992). The activities performed less frequently are studies related to budget development and deployment, revenue projection, the review of academic programs, student evaluation, space allocation and utilization, and academic research resource development statistics. Other studies, such as admission, alumni outcomes, and accreditation are often performed by institutional research offices in conjuncture with other institutional offices (Volkwein, 1990; Litwin & Bolgiano, 1991).

Lasher and Firnberg (1983), Suttle (1984), and Saupe (1990) recognized that one of the more important functions of institutional research was that institutional research professionals not only collect and process data, but also translate data into information useful to planners and decision makers. Another important function pointed out by Harvey and Stewart (1975) is that institutional research serves as an effective "radar system" to alert policy-makers to impending institutional vulnerabilities. This function provides useful data and information and serves as a forecasting strategy indicating the

likelihood and result of environmental threats an institution might encounter in the future. The advent of electronic bulletin boards and access to the Internet have greatly enhanced the timeliness and usefulness of such environmental boundary scanning activities.

Institutional researchers often are under pressure to produce routine reports for both internal and external constituencies (Rourke & Brooks, 1967; Ezell, 1978; Middaugh, 1990; Saupe, 1990; Volkwein, 1990). Volkwein (1990), Harrington, Knight, and Christie (1994) noticed that institutional researchers perceive that they do not have enough time in which to conduct the kinds of studies and analyses which would be personally interesting and professionally rewarding. Moreover, Jordan (1976) and Jones (1989) found that time was critical in determining the order of priority of institutional research activities. "Priorities seem to be at the mercy of time ..." (Jones, 1989).

By all means, employing time-saving methods in institutional research operations becomes inevitable (Wheeler, 1972; Tetlow, 1973; Volkwein, 1990). One prominent method of time-saving has been the increased use and reliance on data acquisition and analysis technologies. Technology has enabled the institutional researcher to accelerate the routine process of reporting and data processing. The availability of a wide range of statistical and data presentation software, much improved computing capabilities of micro-computers, and highly constructed local / national networks have profoundly influenced the information systems management role of institutional research.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

Studies on institutional research history, development, and future challenges help us to understand the profession. Not too long ago, institutional research was, by and large, not considered as a distinct profession. We were described as "number crunchers" and producers of statistical compendiums. Recent studies have shown that institutional research offices, staffed by highly educated and trained professionals, play a critical and highly visible role in guiding institutional operation, planning, and decision making.

Past studies have distinguished institutional research from research in higher education. Dressel (1971) wrote that institutional research does not share the mantle of academic freedom; it is primarily utilitarian and therefore has a distinctive set of values; and its ultimate success depends less on the research findings than on the promotion of actions to alleviate functional weaknesses and increase the effectiveness of the institution.

Proliferation and Centralization

Hearn and Corcoran (1988) addressed the growing phenomenon of the proliferation of the institutional research function. Here a distinction must be made between the institutional research *function* and the institutional research *office*. The function of institutional research occurs in virtually every concern of the institution. These activities can be formal and informal, have very specific objectives or simply be "fact finding" missions. The institutional research office is the physical location within the

organizational hierarchy where the functional activities of institutional research are most highly centralized, and where ultimate responsibility for such activities rest.

Hearn and Corcoran posit three theoretical arguments which elucidate this occurrence:

(1) The *information legitimacy* argument: Institutional research activities will emerge in a decentralized manner if the centralized institutional research office's research claims are not accepted as legitimate by all parties on campus.

(2) The *limited attention* argument: Institutional research will emerge in a decentralized manner if the centralized institutional research office's research and resources are not available to meet all institutional needs perceived to be significant on campus.

(1) The *organizational contingency* argument: The nature of proliferation at a given institution will depend upon external factors, such as demographic and economic trends, and upon a variety of organizational factors unique to that institution.

The benefits of proliferation, as pointed out by Reichard and others (1984), Hearn and Corcoran (1988), and Borden and Delaney (1989) are the reduction of costs, the maintenance of a balance of political "power" within the institution, the maintainace of overall institutional research data acquisition and reporting activities, and improving organizational efficiency and effectiveness.

Schmidtlein (1985) and Saupe (1990) warn of the potential danger in institutional research dispersion, including duplication of effort, failure to see the picture campus - wide, unnecessary competition, varying degrees of expertise, embarrassment caused by conflicting results reported, and misinterpretation of information. However, as Hearn and Corcoran (1988) write: "... although there are undoubtedly some negative implications of proliferation, the process is likely not only to continue but also to produce organizational benefits for many institutions".

Proliferation and centralization of an institutional research office is not the only factor that influences the scope of institutional research activities and functions. The location of the office in the organizational structure also has an impact on the activities performed. Institutional research activities are influenced by both the host office and the expertise of the institutional researchers. A study of doctoral-granting institutions found that the physical location of the institutional research office, the person to whom the office reports, the level of education received, and the researchers' length of experience in the institutional research domain are also factors shaping the activities performed and the participation in institutional decision making processes (Tilton, 1987; Volkwien, 1990; and Harrington, Knight, and Christie, 1994).

It is generally accepted that institutional research plays a critical and central role in the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data utilized in institutional planning, assessment, policy formation, and decision making. Most institutional research offices report to top level administration which implies the importance of institutional research in the institution. Saupe (1990) pointed out that this arrangement recognizes that institutional research supports planning and resource allocation activities which cross organizational boundaries. Most institutional research offices are different in terms of the activities performed. But these activities can be categorized as following:

1. Activities required by the top administrators of the institution - these activities tend to vary from institution to institution in a given time.

2. Activities required by federal or state government, accrediting agencies, and different professional associations - these activities usually had deadlines to meet and took away a tremendous amount of time and appeared to be uniform among institutions.

3. Activities required by internal and external forces related to a particular issue of the institution - these activities were the requests from faculties, trustees, students, parents, or local community. These activities were situational under most conditions.

4. Activities interested by the institutional researchers - these activities tend to vary under the conditions of both the institutional and personal characteristics.

Methodology

The results of our survey research provide a profile of institutional research professionals who have membership in the Southern Association for Institutional Research. Upon receiving permission to use the SAIR membership roster from the SAIR executive committee, we sent surveys to two hundred forty (240) individuals. One hundred ten (110) individuals returned usable surveys for a response rate of 45.8%. These individuals represent 70 different institutions in 17 states. The greatest number of responses (14) came from Texas, representing 13% of all respondents.

To collect the requisite data, we administered a modified version of an instrument developed by Chen for his 1991 national study of institutional research professionals. The survey elicited demographic data and information including institutional classification (public vs. private, 2yr-4yr-univ), degree of centralized institutional research activity, the location of the institutional research office in the organizational structure and the individual to whom the institutional research professional is ultimately responsible. Respondents were asked to describe their professional development activities and instructional responsibilities, educational preparation and previous professional experience. Data was collected which addresses the size and scope of the institutional research office, the perceived importance and necessity of 50 distinctive functional activities, and the identification of those elements of the respondents professional responsibilities which were (1) the most satisfying, (2) the most challenging, (3) the greatest source of frustration, and (4) those individuals perceived as most difficult with

which to work. Additional data was solicited which detailed the respondents operational budget for their institutional research office, and annual salary information.

In part, our research attempts to answer the following questions: "What is the impact of professional identity on one's effectiveness in discharging their institutional research tasks?"; "What is the impact of the location of the institutional research hierarchy and locus of control on institutional research effectiveness?"

We attempted to resolve the partial identity crisis among institutional research professionals in the Southern Association for Institutional Research by answering the questions; "Who are we?", "What do we do that is similar?", "How important are we to our institutions?", and "How similar or dissimilar is the institutional research office and function at my institution as compared to my SAIR colleagues?".

The Institutional Research Office

Table 1 displays a profile of the institutional characteristics of those responding to the survey. One hundred ten individuals, representing 70 separate institutions across 17 states responded to the survey. Three-fourths of the respondents are carrying out institutional research responsibilities in public institutions. Sixty percent are employed by universities, with roughly twenty percent at four-year and two-year institutions respectively. Less than two percent are employed by an educational agency or organization. Ninety-three percent of the respondents indicated that their institutions have a centralized institutional research office. Most report to a Vice President for Academic Affairs (34.3%), others report to an administrator below the Vice President's

level (28.6%), an institution's President (24.1%), and a Vice President for Planning (11.1%). Fewer than two percent indicated that their office reported to a Vice President for Student Affairs. The respondent's institutional mean student enrollment is 10,477 (FTE). The mean institutional budget is $ 178,500,000. The mean budget for institutional research is $ 146,500.

Table 1

Institutional Profile of SAIR Respondents

Institutional Affiliation		N	%
	Public	82	75.9
	Private	24	22.2
	Ed Agency/Org	2	1.9
Institutional Classification	2 Year	19	17.6
	4 Year	21	19.4
	University	65	60.2
	State System	3	2.8
Centralized IR Office	Yes	101	93.5
	No	7	6.5
IR Office Reports to:	President	26	24.1
	Academic VP	37	34.4
	Planning VP	12	11.1
	Student Affrs VP	2	1.9
	Other	31	28.6

Mean Student FTE	10,477
Mean Institutional Budget	$ 178,449,000
Mean IR Budget	$ 146,366

The Institutional Research Professional

Table 2 displays a profile of the 110 institutional research professionals responding to the survey. Nearly ninety percent have earned at least the Master's degree, with 57% holding the doctoral degree. Respondents earned their highest degree in the following academic disciplines: 39% in Education, 22% in Social Science, 10% in Mathematics or Science, and 11% in Business.

The current title of the respondents is primarily "Director of Institutional Research" held by 52% of all respondents. Of these, roughly 22% had previously held a position with the title "Assistant Director/Associate Director of Institutional Research" or "Coordinator for Institutional Research." Nearly fifteen percent currently hold the title "Vice President/Vice Provost for Institutional Research". Eleven percent currently hold the title "Coordinator of Institutional Research". Fewer than 8% of the respondents have the title "Associate or Assistant Director of Institutional Research". Roughly 15% of the respondents charged with institutional research responsibilities have various titles such as "registrar", "Director or Dean of Enrollment Management", and "Director of Admissions" among others.

Concerning previous institutional research experience, fewer than one in five survey respondents have held an institutional research position at another institution. When asked if they originally aspired to a position in institutional research upon entering academe, 82% of the respondents indicated that institutional research was not a position or field to which they aspired. The typical respondent indicated that they have a total

institutional research staff of 4.5 full time personnel (EFT). Of those, 2.22 are professional staff, 1.28 paraprofessional staff (programmers), and 1.03 clerical positions.

The typical respondent has been in their current professional position for 5.12 years, with the maximum tenure of 22 years. A number of respondents (19%) are in their first year. The mean annual salary for respondents is $46,852, with a maximum annual salary of $90,000 and a minimum of $22,200 (part-time salary - annualized).

Table 2

Description of SAIR Professionals

		N	%
Highest Degree	Doctorate	64	56.5
	Master's	36	33.3
	Bachelor's	11	10.2
Field of Highest Degree	Education	42	38.9
	Social Science	24	22.2
	Business	12	11.1
	Math/Science	11	10.2
	Other	19	17.6
Current Title	Director of IR	56	51.9
	Assistant VP	16	14.8
	Coordinator of IR	12	11.1
	Asst/Assoc Director of IR	8	7.4
	Other	16	14.8

Mean Length in Position	5.1 Years
Mean Annual Salary	$ 46,852
Mean IR Staff Size	4.5

Roughly one in three SAIR professionals are currently engaged in research for professional development. Forty five percent of all respondents have published the results of their research in some form since 1993. Of those published, 71% have published in peer-reviewed journals.

Twenty-five percent of survey respondents are currently teaching an academic course. The two most frequently mentioned courses are statistics, and social science curricula. One in three SAIR professionals have faculty rank. Most faculty appoints among survey respondents are tenure track.

Table 3

Teaching and Professional Development

Professional Activity	N	%
Faculty Rank	33	30.6%
Tenure Track Position	11	10.2%
Tenure	8	7.4%
Currently Teaching	27	25.0%
Current Research Project	38	35.2%
Current Publication	49	45.4%
Peer Reviewed Publication	35	32.4%

Access to Technology

In part, we sought to determine the degree to which institutional research professionals have access to, and use, emerging technology. Increased reliance on decision support systems, geographic information systems, environmental boundary scanning, and the implications of the "information superhighway" on institutional research activities, particularly policy research, have greatly impacted the profession. Perusal of the *Chronicle of Higher Education* reveals that a large proportion of job announcements for institutional researchers are requesting familiarity and experience with these emerging technological tools. Asked to identify their access and use of computer-related hardware and software, nearly every respondent (98.1%) indicated the use of wordprocessing software. Use and reliance upon spreadsheet software and mainframe database and statistical applications were rated the second and third highest. Perhaps the most surprising element of our query here found that four-fifths of the respondents relied on access to and use of the Internet. Less reliance was placed upon graphics applications, and use of electronic bulletin boards. Only twenty percent of respondents indicated a use of decision support or executive information systems. One-in-ten use geographic information systems regularly. Table 4 displays the degree to which SAIR professionals have access to, and utilize information-based technology.

Table 4

Access to Technology

Software/Hardware	Access	%
Word Processing	106	98.1
Spreadsheets	96	88.9
Mainframe/Applications	88	81.5
Internet/Bitnet Access	87	80.6
Statistical Software	85	78.7
Graphics	76	70.4
PC-Based LANs	72	66.7
Electronic Bulletin Boards	56	51.9
Decision Support Systems	22	20.4
Geographic Info Systems	10	9.3

Satisfaction and Frustration in Institutional Research

We asked respondents to identify the most satisfying, the most challenging, and most frustrating elements of their institutional research responsibilities. We also attempted to find out which groups or individuals on their campuses were perceived to be the most difficult with which to work.

Having a direct impact on institutional decision making, being able to conduct meaningful studies and projects, and providing timely and useful data and information are the three most satisfying professional elements as identified by respondents. When asked to identify those issues they felt possessed the greatest challenge, respondents indicated that gathering clean data, the shortage of appropriately trained staff, and the ability to communicate the importance of institutional research activities were most challenging. Those elements causing the greatest amount of professional frustration are lack of time to conduct thorough studies, getting timely and "clean" data from their campus computer center, and having to cope with the campus political climate. Those individuals or groups identified by respondents as being most difficult with which to work were the computer center director and staff, faculty, and the academic vice president.

Table 4

Challenges, Satisfaction, Frustration, and Difficulties

		% Agree
3 Greatest Challenges	Gathering Clean Data	30.6%
	Shortage of IR Staff	20.4%
	Communication	10.2%
3 Greatest Sources of Frustration	Lack of Time	39.8%
	Getting Clean Data from Computer Center	21.3%
	Coping with Politics	14.8%
3 Most Satisfying Elements	Impact on Decision Making	48.1%
	Conducting Meaningful Studies	18.5%
	Provide Information Services	12.0%
3 Most Difficult Groups to Work With	Computer Center Staff	16.5%
	Faculty	13.2%
	Academic Vice President	13.2%

Functions and Activities of Institutional Research Professionals

The respondents were asked to rate the value of a list of fifty functional activities germane to institutional research using a five point Likert-type scale. These activities were classified by function. The function classifications were;

1. Academic Program Planning, Analysis, and Review
2. Admissions and Enrollment Planning
3. Alumni and Graduate Studies
4. Budgetary and Financial Analysis
5. Curriculum and Instructional Analysis
6. External Relations
7. Facilities
8. Goals
9. Planning
10. Student Concerns and Perceptions

Academic Program Planning, Analysis, and Review

Overall, the respondents placed a high (μ=3.58) mean value on the activities comprising the academic planning function. Respondents reporting directly to a Vice President for Academic Affairs placed greater importance on these activities than did IR professionals reporting to a president or other vice presidents. The analysis of student learning outcomes and analyses related to institutional self-study were rated highest

(μ=4.00, 3.93) among the six related functional activities. Retrenchment analysis and planning rated the lowest among academic planning functions (μ=3.08).

When asked if the institutional research office should be involved in such activities, 69 percent of the respondents indicated that IR should be involved in the activities of academic program planning, analysis, and review. IR professionals reporting to an institution's president placed greater emphasis on IR's involvement than did those professionals reporting to vice presidents. The functional activities given the highest rating for involvement were those relative to institutional self study (79.6%), followed by analysis of student learning outcomes (76.9%) and faculty productivity studies (72.2%). 58.3% of the respondents indicated that institutional research should be involved in the activity of value added analyses.

Academic Program, Planning, and Analysis
all respondents

Activity	Importance (μ)	IR Involvement ?
Student Learning Outcomes	4.00	76.9%
Value Added Outcomes	3.36	58.3%
Faculty Productivity	3.69	72.2%
Institutional Self-Study	3.96	79.6%
Program/Personnel Retrenchment	3.08	63.0%
Academic Program Review	3.42	65.7%
Cumulative Functional Activities	**3.78**	**64.0%**

Admissions and Enrollment Planning

The activities related to admissions and enrollment planning were rated as being of moderate to high importance to the respondents (μ=3.4). Institutional research professionals reporting to an institution's president rated these activities as more important that respondents reporting to other institutional officers. Retention and attrition studies were rated highest (μ=4.34). Of less importance were activities relating to financial aid analyses (μ=3.03) and market research studies (μ=2.65). Of those surveyed, 64% indicated that institutional research should be involved in admissions and enrollment management. Retention and attrition studies was given the highest involvement rating (86.1%), followed by enrollment projections (73.1%). Financial aid analyses and market research studies were perceived by 52.5% and 49.1% of the respondents as activities with which institutional research should be involved.

Admissions and Enrollment Planning
all respondents

Activity	Importance (μ)	IR Involvement ?
Financial Aid Analysis	3.03	52.8%
Retention / Attrition Studies	4.34	86.1%
Market Research Studies	2.65	49.1%
Enrollment / Applicant Projections	3.67	73.1%
Monitoring Applicant Flow Patterns	3.23	53.7%
Prediction of Academic Success	3.51	69.4%
Cumulative Functional Activities	**3.41**	**64.0%**

Alumni and Graduate Studies

Among the ten functional activity areas, survey respondents, particularly those reporting directly to their institutions president, indicated that institutional research activities focusing on alumni and foundation studies are the least important (μ=2.81). The surveying of graduates was valued moderately highly (μ=3.96), as was the determination of alumni perceptions of academic programs (μ=3.25). Nearly 60% of respondents felt that the institutional research office should not be involved in studies of alumni contributions to the annual fund or alumni participation in campus activities (alumni chapter functions).

Alumni and Graduate Studies
all respondents

Activity	Importance (μ)	IR Involvement ?
Alumni Contributions and Gifts	2.07	13.0%
Alumni Participation in Univ. Activities	1.79	9.3%
Alum Perception of Academic Programs	3.25	57.4%
Survey of Graduates	3.96	75.0%
Cumulative Functional Activities	**2.81**	**38.7%**

Budgetary and Financial Analysis

Institutional research activities addressing issues of budget and financial analysis were rated as moderately important (μ=3.65). Respondents reporting to a vice president for planning rated these activities higher than other respondents. The activity of analyzing resource utilization was rated particularly high (μ=4.29). Of less importance to IR professionals are studies relative to library and learning resources (μ=2.83). Although these activities are rated as having high levels of importance, only 53.7% feel that the institutional research office should be included in such endeavors.

Budgetary and Financial Analysis
all respondents

Activity	Importance (μ)	IR Involvement ?
Administrative Cost Analyses	3.30	47.2%
Resource Utilization Analyses	3.50	56.5%
Revenue and Expenditure Pattern Analyses	3.48	57.4%
Instructional Cost Analyses	3.76	67.6%
Integration of Academic/Budget Planning	3.70	64.8%
Library and Learning Resource Expend Analys	2.83	28.7%
Cumulative Functional Activities	**3.65**	**53.7%**

Curriculum and Instructional Analysis

The functional area of curriculum and instructional analysis includes seven related activities: course selection patterns, grade distribution trends, curriculum needs assessment, development of student credit, evaluation of remedial and non-traditional student support services, faculty workload analysis, and student evaluation of instruction. Overall, respondents rated these activities moderately high (μ=3.23). Institutional research professionals reporting directly to a vice president for academic affairs rate these activities more highly than did all other respondent groups. Of particular importance, are activities relative to faculty workload analysis.

Surprisingly, although survey respondents rated these functional activities rather highly, less than 50% indicate that the office of institutional research should be involved with such activities. Furthermore, of those reporting directly to a vice president for academic affairs, the group that rated the activities most highly, only 54.7% feel that institutional research should be involved in these undertakings.

Curriculum and Instructional Analyses
all respondents

Activity	Importance (μ)	IR Involvement ?
Analysis of Course Selection Patterns	3.03	56.5%
Analysis of Grading Trends/Policies/Inflation	3.23	59.3%
Assessment of Curricular Need	3.04	40.7%
Student Credit Hour Analyses	2.68	14.8%
Evaluation of Remedial/Developmental Programs	3.30	56.5%
Faculty Workload Analyses	3.92	69.3%
Analysis of Student Evaluation of Instruction	3.44	49.1%
Cumulative Functional Activities	**3.23**	**49.6%**

External Relations and Reporting

The value of activities pertaining to external relationship and reporting were rated very highly by respondents (μ=3.75). Of utmost importance are meeting external reporting needs (μ=4.34) and developing the institution's annual *fact book* (μ=4.20). Institutional Research professionals reporting to a vice president for planning rate these activities more highly than the other groups.

Nearly three quarters (72.4%) of those surveyed feel that not only are the activities involved in external relations and reporting highly important, but that the institutional research office should be directly involved in their planning and completion. Those institutional research professionals reporting to a vice president for academic affairs feel more strongly in regards to institutional research involvement than the other groups.

External Relations and Reporting
all respondents

Activity	Importance (μ)	IR Involvement ?
Economic Impact Studies	2.93	52.8%
Institutional Fact Book Development	4.20	83.3%
Peer Institutional Data Exchange	4.06	78.7%
Meeting External Reporting Needs	4.34	83.3%
Institutional Image Studies	3.23	63.9%
Cumulative Functional Activities	**3.75**	**72.4%**

Facilities

Institutional research activities relative to facilities analysis and planning do not rate highly among institutional research professionals (μ=3.07), and in particular, those reporting directly to an institution's president (μ=2.46). Of the functional activities considered somewhat important are the analysis of space needs and costs (μ=3.17), and reporting of space utilization (μ=3.14). Institutional researchers reporting to a vice president for academic affairs rate these functional activities more highly than those reporting to other institutional officials.

Facilities
all respondents

Activity	Importance (μ)	IR Involvement ?
Space Needs and Costs Studies	3.17	48.1%
Projecting Space Requirements	2.89	42.6%
Space Utilization Reporting	3.14	49.1%
Cumulative Functional Activities	**3.07**	**46.6%**

Institutional Goals

The assessment of institutional goals, goal setting, and conducting institutional goals inventories are rated highly (μ=3.68) by institutional research professionals in the Southern Association for Institutional Research. Of particular importance is the assessment of institutional goals (μ=3.88). Institutional research professionals reporting directly to an institution's president rate these three activities more highly than SAIR members reporting elsewhere in their organizational structure. Nearly two-thirds of the respondents indicate that the activities germane to institutional goals should be the province of the institutional research office.

Institutional Goals
all respondents

Activity	Importance (μ)	IR Involvement ?
Assessment of Institutional Goals	3.88	71.3%
Goal Setting	3.66	63.4%
Institutional Goals Inventory	3.50	63.0%
Cumulative Functional Activities	**3.68**	**66.2%**

Institutional Planning

The activities surrounding institutional planning are rated as the most important among the ten functional areas (μ=3.97). Of particular importance are institutional self-study for purposes of accreditation (μ=4.18) and strategic planning (μ=4.11). SAIR professionals reporting to a vice president for academic affairs rate these collective activities more highly (μ=4.12) than do their colleagues reporting to other institutional officers. Three-fourths of the survey respondents indicate that institutional research should be involved in institutional planning activities.

Institutional Planning
all respondents

Activity	Importance (μ)	IR Involvement ?
Development of Planning Models	3.76	71.3%
Institutional Level Planning Activities	3.95	79.4%
Institutional Self-Study	4.18	83.3%
Policy Analysis	3.80	70.4%
Strategic Planning	4.11	75.9%
Cumulative Functional Activities	**3.97**	**75.7%**

Student Concerns and Perceptions

Research on topics of student educational goals and progression, perception and satisfaction, and issues of attrition are considered moderately important by institutional researchers (μ=3.68). Inquiry into student satisfaction with their academic major and the institution, and the examination of student sub-populations (non-traditional and minority students) are considered highly valuable. Institutional researchers reporting to an institution's president rate these activities more highly (μ=3.69) than do their colleagues who report elsewhere in the organizational hierarchy. More than two-thirds of survey respondents feel that their institutional research offices should be directly involved in student affairs research.

Student Concerns and Perceptions
all respondents

Activity	Importance (μ)	IR Involvement ?
Analysis of Student Educational Goals	3.40	54.6%
Analysis of Student Sub-populations	3.70	73.1%
Non Matriculant Student Studies	3.49	66.7%
Student Perception of Needs Studies	3.69	69.4%
Student Satisfaction with Academics Studies	3.77	72.2%
Cumulative Functional Activities	**3.68**	**67.2%**

Variance in Characteristic and Role by Organizational Location

Within the domain of our study, we wanted to determine any differences in characteristic, role, and function of SAIR members by the location of the institutional research office in the organizational hierarchy. Based on previous research, there appear to be distinct differences in characteristics based on institutional classification and the physical location and reporting relationship of the institutional research office.

In part, we found that the larger the institution, the greater the likelihood that the institutional research office reports to the vice president for academic affairs. The smaller the institution, the greater the likelihood that institutional research reports directly to the president. Although the majority of survey respondents indicate that they report to a vice president for academic affairs (n=35), the highest percentage of institutional research respondents indicating that they hold faculty rank report to an institution's president (41.67%). Tenure track appointments and tenure is another matter. Only 8.3% of those individuals reporting to a president and indicating faculty rank, have a tenure track appointment, and 8.3% have tenure. Of those reporting to a vice president for academic affairs and indicating faculty rank (34.3%), 17.2% have a tenure-track position, and 11.4% have tenure.

Roughly one-in-four institutional research professionals in SAIR teach an academic course. 33% of those reporting directly to a president teach, as do 25.7% of those who report to a vice president for academic affairs. Of those reporting to either a vice president for planning or student affairs, none indicated current instructional

responsibilities. The majority of those respondents reporting to a president teach a course in business information systems, while most of those with instructional responsibility under a vice president for academic affairs teach statistics.

Our findings reveal that roughly one-third of the SAIR members responding are currently engaged in research activities for professional development. Institutional research professionals reporting to a vice president for academic affairs are most active in professional development activities than their peers reporting elsewhere in the organizational hierarchy. 57.1% of the respondents reporting to a vice president for academic affairs and currently active in professional development activities have published within the last three years. Among them, two-fifths have published in peer-reviewed journals, monographs, and books.

Location in the organizational hierarchy does not appear to influence longevity in an institutional research position or professional satisfaction. Mean time in the position for all survey respondents is 5.12 years. When asked if they were actively seeking another position at a different institution, one-in-five indicated they were. Of these, 80% held positions with titles below that of *Director*. Although apparently satisfied in their current position, very few respondents indicated that their position in institutional research was one to which they originally aspired, as 14.8% of SAIR members responded that institutional research was the area of primary interest upon entering academe. No respondents reporting directly to a vice president for planning or student affairs originally intended to secure an institutional research job. One-in-ten institutional

research professionals reporting to a vice president for academic affairs aspired to secure their current jobs. Of those respondents reporting to their institution's president, 75% did not originally intended on being employed in the area of institutional research.

Institutional research personnel in the Southern Association for Institutional Research appear to have ample professional and support staff to carry out their various studies and projects. SAIR offices have a mean staff size of 4.53 EFT. Institutional research offices reporting to a vice president for planning have slightly larger staff (μ=5.47), whereas those reporting to a vice president for academic affairs are slightly smaller (μ=4.19). Offices reporting to the academic affairs area also have the smallest clerical support staff (μ=0.88, compared to an overall group μ=1.10).

Institutional research professionals reporting to a vice president for academic affairs are the highest paid (μ= $ 52,540) compared to an overall group mean salary of $ 46,852. Institutional research professionals reporting to a president earn the lowest annual salary among their colleagues (μ= $ 44,757).

The mean annual operating budget for SAIR institutional research offices is $ 146,366. Offices reporting to a vice president for planning reported the largest mean operational budgets ($ 210,083), whereas those reporting directly to a president have the lowest ($118,167).

We sought to determine the degree to which access and use of information technology (hardware and software) was affected by the physical location of the institutional research office in the organizational hierarchy. Although institutional

research professionals who report directly to a vice president for academic affairs indicate a greater use of information technologies on a frequent basis (67.5%), there appear to be no significant differences between groups on the frequency of use of certain types of technologies (graphics, statistics, word processing, spreadsheets, etc).

Finally, we considered the relative importance of institutional research functions as perceived by the respondents, as well as to ascertain whether or not the institutional research office is, or should be, centrally involved in these functions and their related activities. As illustrated in the following table on page 37, the functional activities comprising the institutional planning function were rated more highly than the other nine functional activities. Respondents further indicated that institutional research should be involved in institutional planning activities. Also rated as highly important are activities relative to academic program planning and analysis, and external relations and reporting undertakings. External relations and reporting activities was identified by 72.4% of the respondents as activities in which the institutional research office should be directly involved. However, academic program planning and analysis was identified by significantly fewer institutional research professionals as a set of functional activities in which institutional research should be involved than were the activities of student concerns and perceptions, and the assessment of institutional goals. Studies focusing on the institution's physical facilities and projects analyzing alumni and graduate trends and perceptions are not rated as necessarily important nor activities with which institutional research should be concerned.

Rating of Importance by Institutional Research Function

	Importance	IR Involvement ?
Institutional Planning	3.97	75.7%
Academic Program Planning and Analysis	3.78	64.0%
External Relations and Reporting	3.75	72.4%
Student Concerns and Perceptions	3.68	67.2%
Institutional Goals Assessment	3.68	66.2%
Budgetary and Financial Analysis	3.65	53.7%
Admissions and Enrollment Planning	3.41	64.0%
Curriculum and Instructional Analysis	3.23	49.6%
Facilities	3.07	46.6%
Alumni and Graduate Studies	2.81	38.7%

Rating of Institutional Research Involvement by Institutional Research Function

	Importance	IR Involvement ?
Institutional Planning	3.97	75.7%
External Relations and Reporting	3.75	72.4%
Student Concerns and Perceptions	3.68	67.2%
Institutional Goals Assessment	3.68	66.2%
Academic Program Planning and Analysis	3.78	64.0%
Admissions and Enrollment Planning	3.41	64.0%
Budgetary and Financial Analysis	3.65	53.7%
Curriculum and Instructional Analysis	3.23	49.6%
Facilities	3.07	46.6%
Alumni and Graduate Studies	2.81	38.7%

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